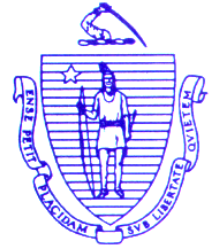




Paul J. Diodati
Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
251 Causeway Street, Suite 400
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 626.1520
Fax (617) 626.1509



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Press Release

BOTTOM TRAWL SURVEYS WITH COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS

PILOT PROGRAM TO BEGIN 2003

The Division of Marine Fisheries (*MarineFisheries*) has been selected by NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) to launch a pilot program for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod surveys beginning early next year. Working in close coordination with Maine, New Hampshire, and NMFS officials and scientists at the Northeast Fisheries Center, *MarineFisheries* will be the Program Manager for this new survey pilot program using commercial fishing vessels.

According to *MarineFisheries*' Director Paul Diodati, "This type of program was championed by *MarineFisheries* in 1999 through the Massachusetts Fisheries Recovery Commission. In the intervening years the benefits of this type of collaborative research with the fishing industry have become obvious. Now we have federal funds and widespread support to move forward." Director Diodati added, "These surveys represent a very timely opportunity for the states and the federal government to work together to improve our knowledge of GOM cod distribution and to gather information sure to improve cod stock assessments. Involving commercial fishermen at the ground level and using their knowledge of cod movements and net design will be tremendous assets. It will demonstrate to fishermen that those who assess cod abundance and manage their fisheries understand fishermen have a wealth of knowledge to contribute."

Three-quarters of a million dollars has been provided by NMFS for this survey work involving 10-day survey cruises using at least four commercial vessels fishing standardized bottom trawls. Deputy Director, Dr. David Pierce, one of the originators of this approach for improving assessments, expressed his gratitude to NMFS and the other states that supported *MarineFisheries*' lead role in these industry-based surveys. He stated, "Everyone seems to understand that we are committed to making this research concept work well. This pilot program must be successful to justify a long-term program. Challenges and obstacles will be overcome with fishermen's knowledge and expertise. Value of these surveys is unquestionable, and we all look forward to this new research partnership with commercial fishermen in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine."

An important part of the survey design will be selection of some stations by fishermen and their involvement in determining sampling strata (distinct areas with set numbers of stations). Fishermen selecting stations is a new twist to the stratified random sampling design used by NMFS in its bottom trawl surveys of fish abundance. A Survey Implementation Team, including representatives from the commercial fishing industry, will work out all these details in the next few months in time for a January start date for the first cod survey.

This new partnership will be coordinated by the NMFS Cooperative Research Partners Initiative (CRPI) with its objective of "collecting data that will improve our knowledge of fish populations and translate this data as an expanded information base for monitoring of existing and developing new fishery management strategies." The 12-member CRPI Implementation Team will have its first meeting no later than October 31. Anyone from the fishing industry willing to serve on that committee should contact David Pierce at 617-626-1532. The deadline for submission is September 30.

MarineFisheries will schedule a meeting(s) in early October with commercial fishermen to answer questions, discuss survey design details, and get ideas about how to ensure survey success. Notice of the meeting date and location will be sent via the *MarineFisheries* listserv and will be posted on our website: www.mass.gov/marinefisheries. Anyone interested in participating should attend the meeting and review the report: "Implementing an industry-based survey pilot fleet in New England".

For more information or to join the *MarineFisheries* listserv contact Melanie Griffin at 617.626.1528.